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Meetings with Sinn Féin

17 November 1997

1. The Government delegation had a bilateral meeting with Sinn Féin at Castle Buildings on 17 November. Sinn Féin were represented by Gerry Adams, Bairbre De Brun and Aidan McAteer.

Molloy remarks

2. The Minister for Foreign Affairs began by indicating that the weekend remarks by Francie Molloy had been unhelpful. Adams noted that, in a radio interview earlier in the day, Molloy had said that his remarks had been taken out of context and that he had been misinterpreted.
3. Gallagher asked whether it would be possible for Sinn Féin to make this clear publicly. Our Ministers had been putting pressure on Trimble, who had been constructive in remarks made last Saturday, and the Molloy comments had not helped matters.
4. Adams suggested that Molloy's radio remarks had placed his comments in their proper perspective. Molloy, like Sinn Féin, was totally committed to the peace strategy. On the press handling of the matter, Sinn Féin would not be happy with any impression that they had been brought to book over this. Molloy had explained his remarks fully and Adams was satisfied with this. He mentioned that Minister Murphy had said that he did not think the story would run and, accordingly, would not be doing any interviews on it. He noted also that John Hume had focussed on the radio remarks in dealing with media queries.

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The talks process

5. In a discussion of Articles 2 and 3, the Minister emphasised the significant political difficulties to which this issue was likely to give rise within his own party. He also made clear that Unionists would have to agree to North/South institutions with executive powers if Northern nationalists were to support an overall agreement. The Government could not move on the question of Articles 2 and 3 until we knew where Unionists stood on North/South institutions.
6. Adams said it was crucial that the British Government begin to make progress at the talks. Unionists would only engage only when they saw some merit in engagement. They had not engaged so far, however.
7. Gallagher suggested that many Unionists were coming around to the view that Sinn Féin were serious and wished to engage. Trimble had left the door open in important respects in remarks last Saturday. Thursday's meeting should give us a clearer view in this respect. He suggested that Sinn Féin might review their tactics for securing UUP engagement in Strand Two.
8. Sinn Féin provided copies of a human rights document which they had prepared (previously circulated). Adams said that they had copied this to Senator Mitchell and to Hume but to nobody else. He hoped that progress could be engendered both outside the talks (such as on prisoners and demilitarisation) and within the process (such as on the human rights issue - hence their document). He also saw positive value in the proposed visit of the Taoiseach to the talks.
9. The Minister mentioned the various meetings over the coming days (Trimble and Blair, Trimble and the Taoiseach, the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister). Recognising that the UUP's lack of engagement was a serious problem for Sinn Féin, he said that he would address this with Trimble at the meeting on Thursday. The Government, he continued, were pressing hard on prisoner issues. We had received undertakings in relation to the transfer of three individuals. We were also pushing very strongly on the de-escalation agenda, particularly in West Belfast and South Armagh. The Minister had emphasised in a TV interview last Friday the need for the observation posts in South Armagh to be dismantled.

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10. Adams complained that, although the two Governments had established an International Commission to deal with decommissioning, there had been no equivalent movement on human rights, confidence-building and the quality agenda. He feared that, if the process were to collapse, all that would survive from it would be the Commission.
11. Gallagher emphasised the strength of the presentation made by the Minister to the British Government on de-escalation issues, which would also arise at the meeting between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister.

Recent defections

12. The Minister asked about recent defections within the Republican movement. Adams said that this was not a problem for Sinn Féin but rather a problem within the IRA which was having a knock-on effect within Sinn Féin. It was difficult for him to get a handle on what was actually happening. Most of the media speculation was being whipped up by the "usual suspects". He understood that Garda sources had been responsible for the initial story by Tom Brady in the Independent. When placed in the context of the ongoing difficulties which Sinn Féin had in the peace process, this problem could potentially become very difficult.
13. Emphasising the crucial importance of a visible dynamic in the peace process promising change, Adams said that the current "bout of discontent" went back some time. The arrest of Tony Kelly had caused problems. Some of the people involved in the recent defections had been motivated to go to the media - a threshold which the Republican movement had not previously crossed. What was untrue, however, was the claim that particular families had given up on the current Sinn Féin leadership. What we were seeing was the working-out of the British Government's minimalist approach, aimed at splitting the IRA. On its own, this was not a big problem. However, in the wider context he had mentioned, this was a serious enough situation which could cause considerable difficulties over time.
14. There was some discussion of the extent to which individual journalists might be pursuing agendas of their own in highlighting these internal difficulties. Adams noted, by way of balance, that Eamonn Mallie had been in South Armagh over the

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past few days but had been unable to find anything to stand up the claims.

Bloody Sunday and McAliskey case

15. The Minister mentioned the pressure which we were bringing to bear on the Bloody Sunday issue. Adams criticised the remarks made by the Secretary of State in the US over the weekend.
16. As regards the Roisín McAliskey case, we were pursuing a number of options. Adams suggested that the Taoiseach might raise this with Chancellor Kohl at the Luxembourg summit. The Minister said that he intended to raise it with FM Kinkel, on the basis of an advance briefing note. He suggested that Martin McGuinness defer his scheduled visit to Germany on Ms McAliskey's behalf until this avenue, which would be supplemented by pressure on the Home Secretary to use executive powers of his own in the matter, had been tested. "Quiet diplomacy" was the approach which the Government favoured.
17. Adams said that the McGuinness visit would be postponed. When Gallagher mentioned that the strategy outlined by the Minister had been agreed with Gareth Pierce and Bernadette McAliskey at a meeting last week, De Brun said that Sinn Féin's efforts were also being coordinated with the latter.



David Donoghue

19 November 1997